



Community

Autumn 1998

The Upasika Newsletter

Issue No. 5



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EDITORIAL

Happy Buddhamas?

Welcome to the bumper end-of-year edition of Community! The main theme of this edition is the feeling and emotional side of practice. Buddhism can become something of a dry intellectual pursuit without enlivening with practices that generate joy, such as dana, or metta practice. It is in the balanced development of the emotional and the intellectual that skillful practice lies.

The factors of enlightenment include the positive emotional side of our natures as well as the intellectual. They include joy and relaxation as well as mindfulness and investigation.

Festivals and celebration also have a role to play in developing joy and gratitude (You may have detected a somewhat festive flavour to this edition!)

The question is - what should Buddhists do at Christmas?

Do we shun it as a 'Christian' festival? Or because it seems to promote non-Buddhist values of materialistic excess?

Actually it seems to me that Christmas has the makings of quite a nice 'Buddhist' festival.

First of all it did not start as a Christian festival, but as an ancient winter solstice festival celebrated in Northern countries.

The Christian faith adapted this festival as it did with so many other 'pagan' events and holy sites.

Strangely enough it seems now as though the Christian veneer has worn very thin and the underlying 'pagan' customs have become dominant. Mistletoe, holly, Father Christmas, feasting, giving gifts, and drinking all come from pre-Christian roots.

However, Christmas seems to me to offer us good practice in giving appropriately - dana - and in accepting gifts graciously and without attachment. (Accepting is often more difficult than receiving, especially when you have opened the third pair of Mickey Mouse socks or an hideous ornament from Aunt Flo).

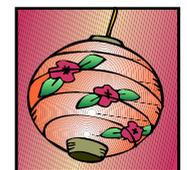
Actually, though, many people go to great lengths to find gifts which they think will be suitable - (including Aunt Flo) - and reflecting upon the good intention behind the giving is a positive and skillful response.

This is also a time for the extended family to get together. Respect for family life is another traditional aspect of Buddhism that can be positively developed at Christmas time.

So the challenge that I think we face is to avoid feeling trapped by habit and popular culture and to steer our Christmas away from excessive indulgence in food, the TV and possessions, and towards a more relaxed and kindly festival where we develop generosity and gratitude to friends and family.

Happy Buddhamas!

Chris Ward



UPĀSAKA (masc.) / UPĀSIKĀ(fem.) lit. sitting close by, i.e Lay Adherent; is any follower who is filled with faith and has taken refuge in the Buddha, his doctrine and his community of disciples. (A.VIII, 25) His/her virtue is regarded as pure if s/he observes the 5 precepts (panca sila: s.sikkhapada). S/he should avoid the following wrong ways of livelihood : trading in arms, in living beings, meat, alcohol and poison. (A.V.177)

[We have been advised that in Pali there is no inclusive male & female plural form for lay follower/adherent. The Community Newsletter uses Upāsikā as the plural form. Editor]

Gratitude

At a recent visit to Amaravati I enjoyed the rewarding feeling of gratitude more strongly than formerly. Time has since passed, but back home, caught in the many distractions of lay life, I still found time to reflect on the relevance of the monastic Sangha in the West and how I had benefited from its presence. The conclusion is that it is very relevant and that I have benefited immeasurably. Like many of my generation, I came late to Buddhism through reading rather haphazardly: - Kerouac, Alan Watts, Krishnamurti, Taoist and Sufi teachings. Finally I met practising Buddhists which led me to tentative practice



on my own.

Moving to London was the gateway to opportunity through the Buddhist Society for which I am very grateful. Eventually the arrival of Ajahn Sumadho and other bhikkhus of the Thai Forest Tradition to Haverstock Hill made a Western Theravadan Sangha possible. Since then that Sangha has spread in England, Switzerland, Italy, New Zealand, Australia and America and there have been many changes, many

arrivals and departures. Some men and women who committed themselves to practice have moved away, some have disrobed and some remain. These events also removed the comfort of

“Example is the greatest part of teaching.”

dependence on certain people and we have had to experience uncertainty, disappointment and the pain of attachment. Yet in the heart of change remains the dedication to practise, the living of the Buddhist life and the strong and necessary link between monastics and lay people.

For new, first generation Buddhists like myself, the presence of a monastic Sangha is invaluable. The Middle Way is not easy. I have strong tendencies to rest, to turn away down tempting by-ways, to doubt and to return to the culturally familiar.

Those who choose to live as far as possible in the way the Buddha lived, who voluntarily choose austerity and who are generous enough to teach the Dhamma, are my very good friends. Example is the

greatest part of teaching.

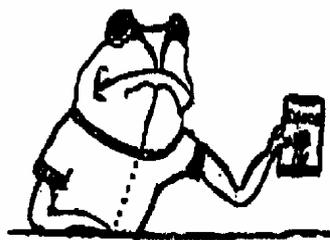
It is very easy to slide into complacency and criticism and feel that maybe the monastic Sangha is not necessary - 'I can go it alone'. Many can but I cannot. I was never arrogant enough to feel that I did not need teachers for music, languages, science etc. For me the monastery is a supportive environment which allows me to practise away from distraction. There I can meet people of like mind or can enjoy solitude. There I can both receive and give what I can. There it is possible to participate in a harmless life.

I know quite a number would disagree. I meet people who feel that lay people are better equipped to practice and to teach than the monastic Sangha. But I appreciate my good fortune in belonging to a fourfold Sangha and enjoy the delights of gratitude.

Even when my visits to a monastery are, of necessity, infrequent, I can recall the atmosphere of peace and kindness generated by those who are prepared to try to be full-time Buddhists 'for the benefit of all sentient beings.'



One day Frog was working in her garden. Toad came strolling by. 'My, what a very fine garden you have, Frog', he said. 'Yes,' said Frog, 'It is very nice, but it was hard work.' 'I wish I had a garden' said Toad wistfully. 'Well, here are some flower seeds.' said Frog. 'Plant them in the ground and soon you will have a garden too.'



'How soon?' asked Toad. 'Quite soon' said Frog. Toad ran home as fast as his legs would hop him. Finding a clearish patch of earth he hurriedly planted his seeds. "Now seeds, " said Toad in a commanding tone, "Start growing". Toad walked up and down a few times. Nothing seemed to be happening. Toad put his head close to the ground and said loudly, "Now seeds, start growing." Toad looked at the ground again. The seeds did not start to grow. Toad put his head very close to the ground once more and shouted, "Now seeds, START GROWING!."

A very agitated Frog came running up the path. "Toad,

some candles. "I will read the seeds a story," said Toad, "then they won't be so afraid." Toad read an exceedingly long story to his seeds. All the next day Toad sang songs to his seeds. And all the following day Toad read poems to his seeds. And the day after that Toad played music for his seeds. Toad looked at the ground. The seeds still did not start to grow. "What shall I do?"

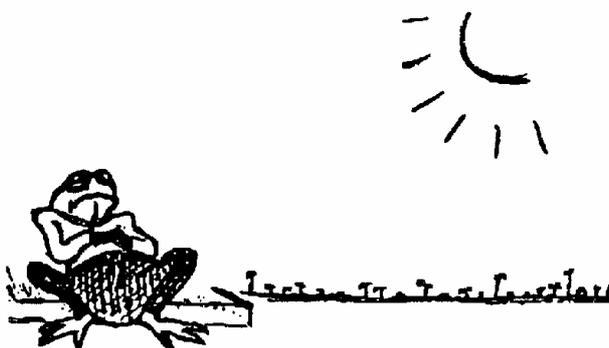
lamented Toad. "I can't think of anything else to do. These must be the most

The Story of Frog and Toad

frightened seeds in the whole world." Then Toad worn out to the very bone from all his exertions, fell into a deep sleep. Frog came by. "Toad! Toad! Wake up!" she cried. "Just look at your garden!" With a sleepy eye, Toad looked at his garden. Little green shoots were coming up out of the ground. "At last!" he cried, "My seeds have stopped being afraid to grow." "And now you will have a nice garden too," said Frog. "Yes," said Toad, "But you were right Frog, it was very hard work."

"Of course" she said. "Leave them in peace for a few days. Let the sun shine on them, let the rain fall on them and soon your seeds will start to grow." That night Toad looked out of his bedroom window.

"Drat", said Toad, "My seeds have still not started to grow. I wonder if they are afraid of the dark." Toad went out to his garden with



Amaravati Temple Opening

Amaravati Temple Opening Update: 3rd - 4th July 1999.

Temple Consecration Day: July 4

The main event will be on Sunday the 4th July. This will be a Dedication and Consecration Ceremony for all our supporters of Amaravati, where, amidst Paritta chanting, reflections and silence, a great marble orb (the luk nimit) will be lowered into its place in the centre of the Temple floor. To this event we will be inviting the extended Sangha of monks and nuns, as well as many friends from other Buddhist and Christian communities.

Open Day for Local Community: July 3rd, in the afternoon

In addition to this on the previous afternoon of Saturday the 3rd July we will hold an Open Day where we will welcome our local community and give them an opportunity to find out about the temple and what our life is about. On this day we will invite people from the surrounding villages, businesses and health practitioners we regularly meet, counselors from the parish, borough, and county level, architects, engineers, and builders involved in the construction of the Temple. It will include an educational exhibit, tours around the site, as well as a gathering in the Temple for reflections focusing on gratitude, friendship and opening the doors for greater mutual understanding and cooperation.

Help is Needed

The Temple is a sacred space that allows us to enter into silence. It brings us together. The consecration itself requires that we work together to make it happen and we will need assistance of various kinds: ushers, servers, parking attendants, and one million other things. If you would like to help in any way before, during or after the ceremony, please contact Shirley Cox at Amaravati.

Unfortunately, accommodation on site will be extremely tight, and we cannot promise any accommodation indoors. There would likely be space for people to camp in tents, or for the Saturday night in bunks in a local environmental centre. But what may be more comfortable would be to stay in your homes and journey out to Amaravati during the day.

Likewise, as we have many overseas visitors expected and accommodation is going to be sardine style with many Sangha and lay people staying in tents, it would be helpful to know if there are 1) any tents we could borrow 2) if anyone is happy to offer space in their homes (even as far away as London is acceptable) and 3) if there are people who are willing to offer lifts for people staying in local accommodation. Again please contact Shirley Cox by phone or post at Amaravati.

T

o be kind you have to be patient with life. The reason we lack kindness is not that we don't want to be kind, it's that we are too impatient to be kind.

Ajahn Sumedho - Community & Responsibility

'A PRESENT CHRISTMAS'

I salute you! There is nothing I can give you which you have not;
but there is much, that, while I cannot give, you can take.

No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today.
Take Heaven.

No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present instant.
Take Peace.

The gloom of the world is but a shadow; behind it, yet within our reach, is joy.
Take Joy.

And so at this Christmas time, I greet you with the prayer that for you, now and
forever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

....Fra Giovanni, 1513

London Rain



It had been raining. Taking cover under the porch of the house the
shower passed as grey clouds move across the leaden sky. Clean air hits
the nostrils. It is wet everywhere. On the pavements, on the leaves and
on the road as a car swishes by.

The clear stillness is broken by a loud plop of water as it falls on the
steps, followed by more plops as water drips from gutters, roofs and
trees. The drops are loud and clear, some sharp, some softer as they hit
the odd patch of earth.



No silence, no plops. Both necessary for the other. Each drop though similar is also distinct and
separate. None better or worse than the other. Even the same drip in the same place is not the same
as the preceding one. And the silence.

Suffering and happiness are like these raindrops. Once they have fallen they have fallen. Having
fallen there is silence. My thoughts and feelings are like these drops of water, and there are so many
of them. To be truthful most of my life I have been caught up in these raindrops. When there were
no drops, I felt my life was empty and had no meaning. At other times the drops were unfamiliar
and frightening. Other drops were exciting and fun and I wanted more of them. I have spent a lot of
time longing for the ones I liked and avoiding the ones I did not want. It was never ending.

I never really stopped to think or realise where they were coming from. I never really noticed the
silence. I read many books, heard many people talk about this silence but somehow, although
vaguely recognising what was said, I never really knew.

And then I knew the silence and 'it' knew me and here was home, so happy. But first I had to know
the pain. It still hurts, but it's not the same. I am so grateful.

Another raindrop, another plop amongst countless raindrops....plop....

Nick Carroll

The wintry nip is already in the air. By mid-November, the shops will herald in the shopping season. From the first sighting of tinsel in the high street, commercial Xmas will be rolling on with Xmas cards, Xmas shopping, carols, the Xmas hit single, Xmas lights, turkeys, food, and more food, alcohol... I don't have to go on; we know what the Xmas frenzy can be like.

It's difficult not to get swept by the infectious euphoria of the Xmas tide... or, if as Buddhists, we feel that Xmas is not for us to celebrate, we can easily become cynical Scrooges or merely join in for the sake of family and tradition. Can this mass midwinter celebration of the Christian world hold anything for Buddhist practitioners?

A Buddhist practitioner, is a full-time "reflector". As such, we can use this opportunity to reflect on the many aspects of

Christmas. The midwinter solstice heralds the birth of Spring; daylight gradually overtakes the long nights of winter. The hope and joy of the birth of another year coincides with the celebration of the birth of the Christian prophet. Remembering in this manner the birth of a wise, compassionate teacher we can reflect on the ever-present potential for goodness and truth to manifest through the human heart and mind. All religious traditions celebrate the birth of their prophet or teacher. This is a time of showing gratitude for their life, their example and their teachings.

What I like about the significance of Wesak, the Buddhist equivalent of Christmas, is that it incorporates not only the birth, but also the enlightenment and the "parinibbana" of the Buddha. A Buddhist contemplating birth also reflects on "death", as any conditioned phenomena, be it thoughts, feelings, or actions, that arise will also cease. However, in between birth and cessation exists the potential for transformation – the potential to go beyond birth and death. That is the significance of the Buddha's enlightenment on Wesak full moon day and Jesus's transfiguration at Easter.

For those who follow the teachings of the wise, every birth of a new day, a new year, a new thought, emotion or activity, is an opportunity to transcend the conditioned realm of birth and death.

The Buddha outlined what needs to be done to break free from the darkness of our ignorance. Isn't it significant that lamps, lanterns and lights feature in festivals that celebrate the birth of a great teacher? It is symbolic of how their teaching brings the light of wisdom which dispels the gloom of ignorance.

In Sri Lanka, people celebrate Wesak by lighting hundreds of patiently hand-crafted paper lanterns. So, as those lights are switched on in

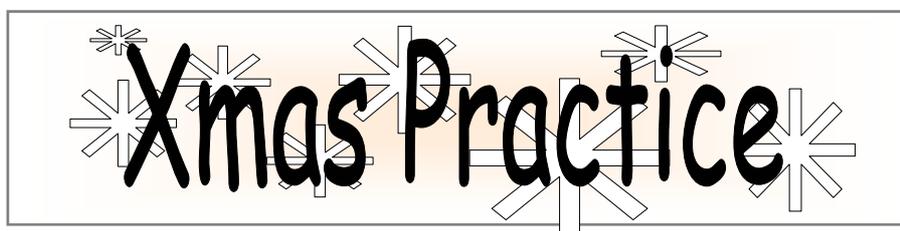
Regent Street this year, we can renew our commitment to the Noble Eightfold Path which enables the practitioner to embody the luminescence of

wisdom by dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

We can regard this season for giving and receiving gifts as an intensified practice of dana and we can remind ourselves that generosity does not only consist of giving material things, but also of our time, labour and love. Dana, hangs together with sila (Xmas festivities provide a good opportunity to be mindful of the fifth precept!) and bhavana (less TV on Boxing Day?). We can send out messages of metta and mudita. We can practice karuna towards those for whom Xmas is a time of hardship and trauma – the homeless, the elderly and the millions of turkeys going to slaughter. And, we can experience Xmas with equanimity by not slinking away from it with aversion and cynicism or getting caught up in the mindless commercial euphoria but with the knowing that as with all such events, Xmas festivities will arise and cease but what is going to be of value are the changes that may have taken place in us in the space between.

Happy Christmas!

Santoshni Perera



The Mirror and Mystery of Metta

Reflections from a 7 day intensive metta retreat at Gaia House, Devon in August 1997, led by Sharon Salzberg and Sharda Rogell.

It would be very unusual to approach a metta retreat without any preconceptions or expectations. Among the 60 retreatants sitting together through the continuous Devonshire rain, there was a fairly common expectation of at least learning how to create pleasant feelings, if not how to become a more loving person.

At the more cynical end was the view that 'too much metta practice will make you, and your usual vipassana practice, sloppy and wishy-washy' (course participant). Well, my particular baggage came from having sat a 2 week personal retreat at Gaia House the previous year. Inspired by Sharon's book 'Loving Kindness, - the Revolutionary Art of Happiness', and by hearing from Sharda of her 6 week personal metta retreat at IMS, USA, I had conducted my own metta intensive, supported occasionally by visiting teachers. Keeping to the traditional mettabhavana form of 6 categories, I had repeated phrases continuously throughout the day from waking to sleep for 14 days. It was a very profound time which left subtle shades of colour throughout my life and gave me an insight into the importance and consequences of the metta. But by misguidedly pushing myself through, what at times felt like the tyranny of the phrases, I had also cast a shadow over the practice for myself.

Consequently, I approached this retreat with slight trepidation, expecting a week of struggle

and carrying one burning question, "Isn't there an easier way?"

I had no need to even voice the question. The opening meditation guidance was a revelation on two accounts. The encouragement was to creatively and sensitively find the words or word, phrases or images that worked for us and to which we could *stay connected*, offering them as a gift to ourselves and others with *no expectation about the outcome*.

We need not feel bound by the traditional wording of the phrases, but with infinite flexibility, feel for

what it is we can **truly** wish in that moment. As importantly, we were also encouraged to take 'breaks' by switching to just sitting, or vipassana practice whenever the phrases or word had lost meaning, or when their repetition was weighing us down - it is no kindness to ourselves to allow the practice to become burdensome. I have to say, most of us found the

teaching of 'take the easiest way' a little difficult to compute. What, no suffering???

However, as a concentration practice, the mettabhavana does require commitment, faith and sustained 'right' effort, and so in a sense it is hard work, not the soft option some had thought. But the emphasis was not on how often we drifted off or how well we could sustain this concentration, but on how we responded at the point we realised we had strayed from the practice. Were we frustrated and irritated with ourselves? Were we seduced into 'just finishing off thinking through this dilemma' before returning to the phrases?

Could we immediately respond with a gentleness and compassion towards ourselves whilst firmly



How deeply could we be patient and accepting of ourselves?

However, as anyone who has sat a retreat knows, all is not sweetness and light! For many of the retreatants the second great illusion about the purpose of the practice was also shattered at an early stage. Rather than experiencing the generation of a wealth of radiant, loving feelings, I found myself pitched into painful confrontations with many 'unpleasant' feelings. This practice strikes straight to the heart of many of our most treasured attitudes, illusions, negative mind states and attachment to isolation. To practice metta is to invite our dark sides to emerge, to hold up a clear and sharply focussed mirror in which is exposed the inner and outer places where we are stuck - or attached.

Not a pretty reflection sometimes and certainly, for me, not easy to endure a stark confrontation with the relentless litany of comment, comparison, criticism, derision, nitpicking, grumbling, complaining thought patterns that have such a sustained and seemingly all pervasive grasp on my mind. Reflections on not-self and impermanence did little to slow the initial slide into despair about what a dreadful person I concluded I was - and for goodness sake, I should be much further along the path by now!

Being reminded to have faith in the practice, much of the ensuing retreat left me focussing 90% of my daily practice on offering metta and forgiveness towards myself. What a great comfort to hear in the small group sessions that most others were facing similar demons, and to hear the teaching that the majority of the practice did need to be directed towards ourselves, that this is not self-indulgent. Until we touch and know and can rest in that spring of loving connectedness within us, how can we truly give to another? How can we hope to be steadfast midst the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'?

I left the retreat with such gratitude for this

practice having seen its enormous flexibility, potential for application and its far-reaching consequences. As I re-learned that to have the intention is enough, to trust that the practice and the mystery of its process does work, I also saw how flexible and creative we can be in using metta. Not only does it lead to many insights of itself, but it can also bring a new sensitivity and richness to other meditation practices. As a 'tool' it not only highlights our unhealed wounds and attachments, but gives us a way of accepting, resolving and healing.

Thus we can apply all 6 of the traditional categories to oneself, or to one person (e.g. aspects of them you find inspiring, find easy to love, aspects you are neutral about, aspects you have difficulty with etc.), or similarly to a place, a situation, our body, a relationship etc. The practice of the metta can be woven into the fabric of our day to day life until we can allow its

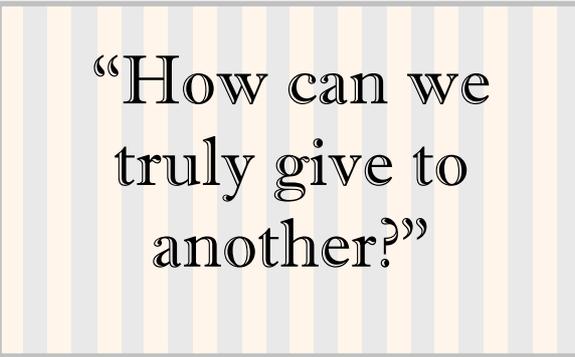
subtle colour and richness to inform each breath we take, every word we speak, until we experience each action we make as sacred.

This path to kindness, is for me, not an easy one. I suddenly saw what an enormous act it is to be kind, even in small ways and how

important it is to appreciate and be grateful for those moments when our true loving spirit shines through. For to be kind to another and myself is, as Rilke says:

'...perhaps the most difficult task of all - the work for which all other work is but preparation. It is a high inducement to the individual to ripen; a great, exacting claim upon us, something that chooses us out and calls us to vast things.'

Chris Blain



“How can we truly give to another?”

LETTERS

Dear Editor,

I am writing this to ask for your comment as a supporter of the monastic Sangha, on a sensitive matter that the monastic community and their stewards are trying to clarify.

Over the years we have said goodbye to a number of people who have spent varying amounts of time as monks and nuns with the Sangha here in England. The way that the order of monks and nuns has been set up by the Buddha is that the determination to practice the mendicants life is for a set period only - a vassa, or previously discussed period with the preceptor.

Deciding to leave requires such a lot of reflection that there must be very little energy left for practical matters like finding appropriate clothing. When a reasonable period of notice is given then lay supporters are able to come forward with offers of accommodation, cash, or the necessary baggage of life

Gratitude and Dana

in the world.

The community always offer hospitality for an ex-monastic to stay as a lay person with food and accommodation found during the period of adjustment. The English Sangha Trust acting as stewards for the money donated to the monastery has offered travel funds to all disrobing monks and nuns, and a capital sum for subsistence in the first few weeks to those that needed it.

What would be the most skillful way to support our friends as they go on their way? Should there be a separate fund for support of disrobing or should it come from the general funds offered for the four requisites? Should there be a half way house? a self-help group?

The lay Directors of the English Sangha Trust feel that feedback is necessary from those who offer their money to support the Monastic Sangha in this country. Please drop a line or phone with your views either :

Medhina, 2 Kenmure Ave, Brighton, BN1 8SH (01273 554988)

Colin Ash, Woodthorpe, Manor Crescent, Seer Green,

Dear Editor

First of all a heartfelt thank you for all the time, effort and skill that obviously went into the last "impressive" edition of Community.

I would appreciate more debate of the practicable challenges of walking the Middle way whilst earning a living, maintaining a home/relationship and living in a world where the human condition naturally seems to encourage gossiping, analysing, acquiring, achieving, striving, and having opinions on everything and everyone. Quite normal, but often involving situations seemingly at the opposite end of the emptiness, signlessness and desirelessness scale!

I love the Dhamma - hearing it, reading it - its truth resonates deeply, but "realising" it in the heat of daily life is challenging, and so when I read or hear other peoples wise reflections, they can have the effect of marginalising me with the thought arising that the authors cannot possibly live in the same world, or that I must be a hopeless case, because despite being on The Path, meditating regularly, attending retreats, I am so rarely able to realise the truth or the impermanence of any stuation so how can I be a good Buddhist and what have I been doing all these years?

The Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path remain

wonderful heartfelt aspirations. Meditating in the morning is sometimes possible, but not taking time off during the day and quite frankly when I come home in the evening I am normally too wound up and mentally tired to sit, so how to change a normal pressurised lifestyle steeped in generations of conditioning, when steps into the unknown are just too frightening?

I aspire to know my mind states i.e happiness, confusion, fear, anger etc. and welcome all these very normal human conditions as my teachers; so that I can be at ease with the way it is and not always want everything to be perfect, but my honest experience is that my faith or ability in taking refuge cannot be skillful enough because worldly demands (real or imaginary) , are just too great and overwhelming.

I know that my psychological makeup is all part of this so-called wonderful equation and I do give myself a hard time, but I would appreciate a break!. Maybe signing up or living in a monastery for a while is the only way - it is certainly a lifestyle that makes a lot of sense.

Perhaps in Ajahn V's words I am just a hopeless basket case?!

(ed. Name withheld at authors request)

Book Reviews

Buddhism without Beliefs. Stephen Batchelor. Publ. by Bloomsbury

This is an interesting and controversial book by an accomplished author. It is well-written and reflects Stephen Batchelor's long experience of a number of Buddhist traditions. The book includes interpretations of 'enlightenment' and some other key teachings and contains some striking descriptions and analogies for meditation and mindfulness. However, I find myself uncomfortable with the basic thrust of the book. It seems to be based upon the view that Buddhism is like the Christian Church with a clear hierarchical power structure and a dogmatic approach.

The Buddhism that I know is decentralised, lacks any central authority and is not dogmatic. Stephen Batchelor says that what makes a Buddhist a Buddhist is that he believes in the Four Noble Truths. Many Buddhists would find this an odd statement. We respect the Noble Truths, we work with them, we use them as guides, but they are teachings to help us, not doctrines to be believed. The same goes for all of the teachings. This is very much the approach taught by Ajahn Sumedho and the Forest Sangha Tradition. I am also surprised that in discussing belief no mention is made of the three refuges - the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. These are professions of trust or faith rather than belief, but they seem closer to distinguishing a 'Buddhist', than belief in the Four Noble Truths.

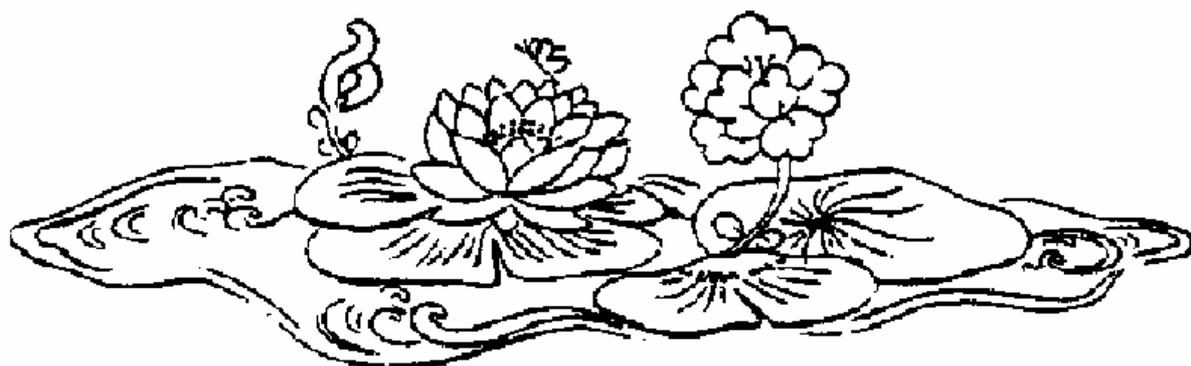
It is almost as though Buddhism is being presented in a way that will strike an accord with Don Cupitt's Sea Of Faith group who have been criticising Christianity for many years along similar lines to some of the arguments used by Stephen Batchelor.

Stephen Batchelor also questions Buddhist teachings about kamma, rebirth and dependent origination. There is no doubt that these can be interpreted in ways which encourage superstition and speculation. However, they can also be used as teachings which apply to the current moment, and this is an entirely respectable way of using them.

Having depicted Buddhism as a rigid hierarchical church based upon doctrine and belief, the author then suggests that it is in danger of either being subsumed by contemplative Christianity or by Psychotherapy. I think both of these unlikely, although if Buddhism could revitalise Christianity then so much the better. Christianity, however, has severe problems of its own and is declining very rapidly. Psychotherapy has many who would lay claim to Buddhism, but is split by different approaches, lacks a transcendent element and often presents a view of the 'self' that would be regarded as deluded in Buddhism.

Although I found myself at odds with some of the key messages in this work, it provides an interesting and readable addition to the debate about how Buddhism is taking root in the west.

Chris Ward



More Book Reviews

Thoughts Without A Thinker, Psychotherapy from a Buddhist perspective. Mark Epstein. Pub by Duckworth

The world of Psychotherapy is as varied and as colourful in its different styles and theories as is the world of Buddhism. However, at root, both worlds have one thing in common - the attempt to understand and alleviate suffering.

As a Buddhist practitioner and Freudian Psychotherapist, Epstein has made a valuable contribution to the discussion about the compatibility of the two. Writing in a style which is easy to read, full of heart and humour and littered with illustrations from both his own practices and experience, he is able to present complex ideas simply. He describes the psychological view of the Four Noble Truths and the representations in the Wheel of Life, discussing in detail the real meaning of the word ego and the misuse which has become prevalent, leading to much confusion and miscommunication.

Epstein is open about discussing the shortcomings of Freud and points out how the approach has developed since the latter's time and rather narrow view point. However, he also explains the relevance and importance of psychotherapy as an adjunct and support to practice and warns of the danger of using meditation practice as an avoidance of deep psychic pain. Epstein also discusses the correlations and differences between therapy and meditation practice, in particular the power and value of silence, the effects of a particular quality of attention, the consequences of ignorance, and Psychotherapy as a reconstruction of self, with Buddhism as a method of deconstruction.

That psychotherapy creates dependence and leads to a magnification of a sense of self is a common opinion. Apparently Freud himself had doubts as to how one knew when a therapy had served its purpose and was finished. Epstein suggests that there is a natural progression in the therapeutic journey from integrating the 'I' (disowned pain and feelings) to an investigation of the 'I', a process in which a recognition of the fluidity of our emotions leads to a recognition of the fluidity of 'I' - a process of shifting from habits of 'denying' to 'disidentification', a subtle but important difference. The former is an act of repression with dangerous consequences, the latter a forming of a relationship with an aspect of our inner being which allows a measure of choice about our behaviour.

Whilst I could argue a number of points with Mr Epstein (for example his assertion that one cannot go beyond the ego), I would recommend this book to those both with or without a knowledge of therapy. A book to be read with a critical eye and open heart.

Marijke Acket

The Amaravati Upasika Association Committee members (in alphabetic order) are as follows:

Bandu Amarawardena,
Vicky Assling,
Anna Badar
Nick Carrol
Alex Clingan,
Jeffrey Craig
Martin Evans,
Tony Fisher,



Radmilla Herrmann,
Keith Matthews,
Colin Rae,
Jean Spinks (Supannya)
Tony Spinks
Chris Ward,
Gill Williamson.

THE AUA PAGE

The Amaravati Upasika Association Committee

Q. What does the committee do?

A. We meet to review how previous study days and weekend retreats have gone and to plan forthcoming events. If there is a 'special' event we are involved with (such as Kathina) then this will also be discussed.

Q. How often does the committee meet?

A. Around 5 or 6 times a year, with additional smaller meetings for those who undertake other projects such as editing the newsletter . Meetings usually last for 2 hours and are held at Amaravati.

Q. How are the meetings run?

A. The Meetings are fairly informal, although we have an agenda and do try to get through the business and keep to time. Meetings are minuted with the focus being on decisions taken and actions allocated.

Q. Can anyone join in the meetings?

A. The meetings are open to any AUA member and anyone invited by the committee.

Q. When is the next meeting?

A. On Saturday 23rd January 1999 at Amaravati

Q. How does attending committee meetings lead to enlightenment?!

A. From a practice and personal perspective, the meetings provide an opportunity to use speech appropriately and apply mindfulness and wisdom to the matters in hand. The meetings are an act of dana where our time is given towards something worthwhile. There is also the inspiring thought that the decisions we reach will make a small but important contribution to the unfolding of the Dhamma and to the continuing vitality of the fourfold Sangha.

Cash Crisis Hits AUA?

You will notice from the AUA accounts on the left that we are not covering our costs. This is likely to become even more of a problem with the regular publication of 'Community'. Although we can publish the newsletter at a relatively low cost per edition this still amounts to quite a substantial outlay once postage is included.

We welcome additional contributions to enable us to increase Community to three or four editions next year.



AMARAVATI UPASIKA ASSOCIATION
Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts

INCOME and EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
Year Ended 30th June 1998

	Current Year		Previous Year	
	£	£	£	£
INCOME				
General Donations		358		389
Donations Towards Kathina Expenses		1260		170
Upasika Weekend Contributions		755		-
		-----		-----
Total Income		2373		559
EXPENDITURE				
Kathina Expenses	1596		-	
Upasika Weekend Expenses	680		-	
Printing and Stationery	51		480	
Postage	77		122	
		-----		-----
Total Expenditure		2404		602
		-----		-----
Net Deficit		(31)		(43)
		=====		=====

Connections

CHITHURST

This summer several lay supporters have helped the monastic Sangha dismantle the coach house in preparation for the laying of the foundations for a new Dhamma Hall, a building which will offer us all in the lay community a new focal point. A Stone Laying Ceremony is planned for July 1999 and it is hoped that some of the dignitaries who attend the opening of the temple at Amaravati will be able to visit Chithurst for this event too.

In addition to the usual Lay Forums and the Forest Days, 2 local lay supporters have organised a 10 week course in 'Chanting for Pleasure'- an adult education class with a difference!! Plans are also afoot for the annual Children's Party on 24th December. In the past we have put on plays and other entertainment with music which, as well as amusing the children, has provided some light relief from the usual monastic routine! Christmas Day will be a quiet reflective time when lay people are welcome to join the monastic sangha for the meal and puja, and the Renewal and Resolution ceremony for lay people will be held on 3 January 1999 - a wonderful way to start the New Year.

Details: Barry Durrant 01730 821479

HARTRIDGE

Baby Blessing Ceremony - Emily Westlake. Joshua was born just minutes after the 'Angulimala Sutta' had been chanted at Hartridge at the new moon sitting in August 1997. As we wanted him to have a connection with Buddhism, and in appreciation of the support of the monastic Sangha, we arranged a date for a blessing ceremony in July of this year.

The sun shone as our parents, grandparents and friends arrived at the monastery laden with food and gifts. After the dana meal we gathered in the Shrine Room, where a ball of thread was passed around everyone in the room, starting in the hand of the Buddha-rupa and around the bowl of lustral water. We held the thread in our hands and wrapped it around Joshua's middle, so

joining us all together to signify our inter-connection and collective good intention for him. We directed our positive thoughts to Joshua whilst Ajahn Siripanna and the Sisters chanted the blessing chants and then sprinkled us with water to symbolise the blessing in which all of us can share. The thread was cut in pieces for us to wear round our wrists, so that every time we look at our ceremonial bracelets we can think of Joshua and wish him blessings.

Joshua sat quietly (well, fairly!) throughout the ceremony and as soon as it was over, fell fast asleep on a meditation mat. He was obviously left with a feeling of inner peace and contentment! We too loved the ceremony. It gave a feeling of love, light and celebration involving everyone present. A big thank you to all the Sisters, especially Ajahn Siripanna.

Supporters' meetings continue to take place on the first Sunday of even months where we aim to co-ordinate our support for the monastery and to support each other although the August meeting took the form of a walk and picnic with the nuns at Dumpdon Hill. We organise the Work Days which have recently been focused on tending the trees in the grounds. The monastic land could be made into a truly beautiful place, but being such a far flung community of supporters, we do not have the person-power to carry out the tremendous amount of work needed. We do what we can.

Weekly Sunday evening talks and monthly Saturday afternoon Meditation workshops continue. There is a special workshop on 26th December on 'Metta and Forgiveness' - everyone is welcome to come along and join in. We are also delighted to be offered the opportunity for deeper dhamma discussion at the new Dhamma Workshops, the first being held on 15 November - 'Right Speech'.

Christmas is an open day for us to share in the meal and spend time at the monastery and New Year will be a quiet celebration. The lay community will gather again for our first formal Renewal & Resolution precepts ceremony on 3rd January 1999, just before the nuns go into retreat.

Details of all events from the monastery or Paul Woods, 01404 831605

Giving Yourself Some Space

This was my reason for going on a 5 day women's retreat at Burnlaw up in Northumberland earlier this year. Time out from a hectic routine of being a part-time civil servant, part-time volunteer and full-time mother of 2 young children was what I really needed in order to recharge my batteries in readiness for the equally hectic months ahead.

And I know that these reasons, although different in detail, were shared in essence by the other participants, as we settled down together under the guidance of Sisters Jutindruya and Ananda Bodhi to sit, walk, practice yoga, do tai chi and voice exercises and play a number of "games" which helped to counterbalance the effects of a substantial midday meal.

It was a wonderful week and for me something deep shifted in that atmosphere of support and relaxation that is unique to being with a group of other women. The variable Northumbrian climate seemed only to complement my changing mind states as I gradually gave myself permission to just "be".

Those of us who live up North hope to repeat the experience again this year but would like to make it clear that the retreat is open to all women, regardless of where you practise or which monastery you support.

It is always daunting for one person to organise something like this, which is why it is preferable for a few of us to share the responsibility for the various tasks involved, such as locating a suitable venue, taking care of the bookings and money, organising the cooking, buying the food, coordinating transport for the nuns. That way, we can all enjoy the retreat without feeling burdened by the running of it.

A venue near Kendal in Cumbria is being considered for the 1999 retreat but if you know of anywhere suitable or would like to be involved in any way at all, please give me a ring.

Carmel brown
01706 219747
For Ratanagiri events :
Contact Marion Keay 01388 817974
Mike Downham 01697 748214

Notices

Donations and Mailing list

If you do not wish to remain on the AUA mailing list please let us know. This enables us to reduce the size of mailings and to save money.

If you wish to continue on the mailing list then you need do nothing. However, any contributions you can make to cover the production of the newsletter and the three or four mailings each year would be greatly appreciated.

Please send donations to
AUA , Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ,

Community on the Web!

This Newsletter and other Upasika information can now be found on the internet at

<http://www.btinternet.com/~upasika/>
or
<http://members.tripod.com/~upasika/>

Contributions to Community

Your contributions, letters, graphics, and suggestions are invited for future editions. However, please do not be disappointed if they are not always acted upon.

It greatly reduces production time if you can send your contributions in electronic form (accompanied by a printed version), either on a 3.5 inch floppy disc in PC format as a basic text file or Word file, or included within an email to : upasika@btinternet.com

However, if you do not have access to a computer, typed contributions are very welcome.

Future Community themes may include 'Travel and Journeys - (both physical and spiritual); 'Work '. 'Positive and negative contact with other faiths'.

Erratum

In the last issue the article on the Californian based UT community, was in fact written by Frederic Kral (Upasaka Santideva) and not DC.

DIARY 1998

Amaravati Upasika Events

The Amaravati Upasika Association organises a series of Study Days and weekend retreats. These are open to all who have some experience of meditation and wish to develop their practice further. Those wishing to follow the Upasika Training Guidelines and join the Upasika mailing list are invited to contact the numbers below or write to AUA, c/o, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ, England

1999 - Study Days and Weekend Retreats

23-15th April - Tranquillity and Insight Retreat

12th June - Mother Earth
(The 3 Fires, Renunciation)

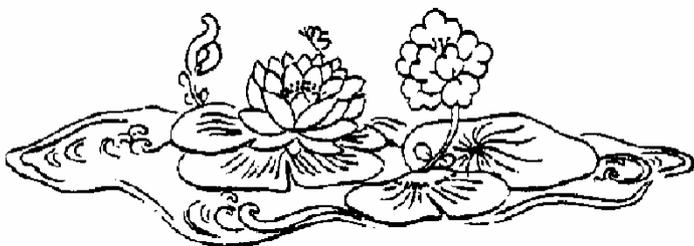
24th July - Living in Community
(Right Livelihood, Worldly Winds)

4th Sept - Responsibility
(Kamma, Mindfulness, Right Effort)

1-3rd October - Brahma Viharas Retreat

13th Nov - Moral Dread!
(Kilesas, Sila)

Details: Nick Carroll 0181 740 9748
Chris Ward 01442 890034



The Bodhinyana Group

We meet weekly at Amaravati (in the Bodhinyana Hall) during school term times. Membership is open to all interested in lay Buddhist practise. The meetings are from 7.30 till 9.30 on a Wednesday evening and usually contain a period of open discussion. We are fortunate to have one meeting a term led by a member of the Sangha.

The programme for this Winter is:

*23rd September - Cessation and the Transcendent
(Led by Ajahn Attapemo)*

30th September - Open evening

7th October - Mindfulness

14th October - Investigation

21st October - Energy

28th October - Open / basic Buddhism

4th November - Delight

11th November - Tranquillity / Relaxation

18th November - Concentration

25th November - Equanimity

2nd December - Right Intention

9th December - Metta

For further details contact either :
Chris Ward 01442 890034

ONE DAY VIPASSANA MEDITATION RETREATS
1998 - 1999 with teachers from GAIA HOUSE

LONDON

November 15 Sharda Rogell

December 20 Yanai Postelnik

January 11 Russell Walker

February 21 Martine Batchelor

March 21 Russell Walker

April 18 Christopher Titmuss

May 16 Yanai Postelnik

June 20 Stephen Batchelor

Contact: Barry Letts 0181 445 2888
- apologies for getting the number
wrong in the last edition.

Editorial & Production Team : Chris Ward, Chris Blain, Robert Brown, Nick Carroll

Please address contributions to:

The Editor,

c/o Community Newsletter, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, HP1 3BZ, England

The Community Newsletter is put together and published as an offering to others. All views and comments are personal.

Costs are covered by donations.